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[BOE] Correspondance

1 message

Jason L. <jaylach@gmail.com> Fri, Apr 11, 2025 at 12:23 PM
To: BOE@colchesterct.org

Please include the following letter as correspondence for your next Board of Education meeting.

To the Members of the Colchester Board of Education,

I write today to express my continued concern regarding the Board's troubling approach to public comment and viewpoint fairness. First, allow me to recount a brief and important history.

On February 27th, 2025, I attended a Board of Education meeting during which agenda item 2.3 —*"Statement from the Board Chair on FOI/Public Comment"*—was addressed. Immediately after the Chair delivered her prepared statement, I raised my hand via Zoom and was called upon to speak. I began my comment specifically in response to agenda item 2.3, voicing my objection to the Chair's interpretation of FOI and public comment rules. After speaking for approximately 25 seconds, my microphone was muted without warning or explanation, and I was not permitted to finish. Curiously, the meeting minutes falsely reflect that I was allowed to speak. Fortunately, the video recording of the meeting confirms that this was not the case.

Afterward, the *Rivereast* became aware of the incident and reached out to both myself and the Board Chair for comment. In her response to the paper, the Chair claimed my comment did not pertain to an agenda item. This is categorically false—I was speaking directly to item 2.3. When pressed by the *Rivereast*, she shifted her position, stating that item 2.3 was not meant for public discussion—that it was an item only *she* could speak to. Convenient.

Fast forward to the Board's April 10th, 2025 Special Meeting. The agenda included just four items: Call to Order, Roll Call, Public Comment, and Possible Revisions to the Board of Education Budget.

During the Public Comment section, a citizen named Sam Norman—who also happens to be both the president of the local teachers' union and an employee of the Board—was recognized to speak. He was permitted to do so **without stating his address**, even though the Board Chair has repeatedly emphasized that all speakers must provide their address in order to speak. In fact, she once threatened to prevent a member of the public from commenting unless he complied—this, notably, was someone who has been vocally critical of the Board.

Additionally, Mr. Norman was allowed to speak for **3 minutes and 31 seconds**, despite the stated public comment limit of 3 minutes. In a previous meeting, Margo even suggested reducing that limit to 2 minutes. Yet, no timer was enforced here. Even more troubling, Mr. Norman's comment had **nothing to do** with the only agenda item—budget revisions. He opened his statement by saying he wished to speak about teacher morale and stress, a topic completely unrelated to the agenda.

Curiously, the official meeting minutes make no mention of Mr. Norman's address—nor do they include the address of the WJJMS Vice Principal, who also spoke and *did* provide hers. This is in stark contrast to other

meetings, where addresses are consistently recorded. In fact, in one instance, when a citizen failed to state his address aloud, the Board had the clerk look it up and include it anyway. So the standard clearly exists—it's just applied when convenient and quietly ignored when it involves favored voices. Funny how that works. But moving forward, citizens of Colchester should expect for their privacy to be just as respected and be referred to as simply “Colchester Resident” in meeting minutes.

But let’s be honest, this was blatant favoritism towards voices the Board clearly views as allies—people safely non-critical of their actions and whose comments align with their goals. Let's stop pretending otherwise.

Mr. Norman is a clear, shameless example of the Board extending privileges to an ally while enforcing arbitrary and ever-changing restrictions on those they view as inconvenient or critical. We’ve heard the Chair claim that speaking directly to an agenda item was somehow *against* the rules. We've seen the Chair assert that a survey conducted **on school property, on school-issued devices, administered by school employees** was irrelevant to discussion of the school budget. And yet, when it comes to Mr. Norman, a Board employee and ally speaking off-topic for longer than allowed—**not a single attempt at correction or interruption.**

There can be **no clearer, no more indefensible** example of viewpoint discrimination by this Board of Education.

But of course, the Chairman will concoct some new, twisted rationale to justify this blatant hypocrisy. She'll insist Mr. Norman’s off-topic comments were somehow perfectly relevant—because when something conveniently aligns with the Board’s desires, she’s not afraid to channel her inner Simone Biles, performing breathtaking mental gymnastics to explain why the rules simply don’t apply. To this Board, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* isn’t a cautionary tale—it’s an instruction manual.

This Board should be utterly ashamed—ashamed not only for its flagrant disregard of the United States Constitution, but for its outright abandonment of basic American principles and democratic values. Some of you have even taken a solemn oath in your previous career to protect and uphold these very ideals.

Yet—tragically, laughably, and entirely predictably—I have absolutely no expectation that a single member of this Board will so much as blink in the direction of accountability. If your track record is any indication, there will be no reflection, no apology, no course correction. Just the usual routine: dig in your heels, double down, triple down, and then pat yourselves on the back for your unwavering commitment to... yourselves.

And of course, you’ll do it all while dramatically clutching your pearls, gasping like overwrought stage actors, and casting yourselves as the poor, fragile victims—besieged by those mean, ungrateful citizens who simply *don’t appreciate* how hard it is to trample on democratic norms with a straight face.

Because by now, let’s drop the charade—this was never about public service, or some grand, principled plan to improve education for the students. If that were true, the energy would be going into transparency, fairness, and listening. Instead, it’s gone into turning your seats on this Board into personal spotlights—where you can preen, posture, and carefully curate your own applause while silencing anyone who dares clap off-beat. It's not leadership. It's theater. And not even good theater.

And hey—I get it. Sitting through public comment isn’t a spa day. Hearing criticism—especially when it isn’t wrapped in a compliment sandwich and a bow—isn’t exactly a crowd-pleaser. Believe me, I know. Your own Michelle Millington made sure I got the full experience when I was a Selectman. She told me, on more than one occasion, how lousy of a job she thought I was doing. And guess what? Not once did I even *consider*

cutting her mic or tossing her opinion aside because it wasn't neatly labeled on the agenda. Because I understood something that seems to have gotten lost here: being in public service means being publicly accountable—even when it's uncomfortable… no, especially when it's uncomfortable.

Public discourse is supposed to be messy. It's supposed to make you squirm a little. That's the point. The right to address your government without being silenced, dismissed, or scolded like an unruly child isn't some tedious obligation you suffer through while waiting for your next photo op—it's the bedrock of a functioning democracy. If hearing criticism sends you into fits of procedural pearl-clutching or inspires vague threats and condescending smirks, then maybe—just maybe—the problem isn't the public.

Maybe the problem is that deep down, you were never interested in serving the public—you just wanted the power and adoration without the accountability.